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Congresswomen Matsui, Capps Urge Super Committee to Continue Federal Support for Health Prevention Measures

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, Congresswomen Doris O. Matsui (CA-05) and Lois Capps (CA-35) sent a letter to the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction recommending that the “Super Committee” not make cuts to funding for preventive medicine and other prevention efforts. Both Congresswomen Matsui and Capps serve on the Energy and Commerce Committee and have been longtime advocates of health preventive measures, often leading the way on Congressional support for such policies.

Congresswomen Matsui and Capps recognize the positive impact of preventive programs on the physical and fiscal health of Americans, but worry that preemptive measures to reduce chronic conditions and disabilities has not been made a high enough priority by the federal government. The two Congresswoman write in their letter, “Unfortunately, preventative care has long been overlooked as a priority. As a result, we are seeing rapid increases in the prevalence of chronic conditions. In fact, 45 percent of Americans have at least one chronic condition, and 26 percent have multiple.”

“We must make a sustained investment in health prevention in order to keep people from getting sick and out of the hospital,” said Congresswoman Matsui. “Investments in tobacco cessation prevents the onset of lung cancer; promoting healthy eating habits and regular exercise can reduce the risk of the onset of type 2 diabetes; and regular and appropriate cancer screenings can catch any potential cancers at early enough stages to increase the highest possible survival rate. We know dollar to dollar that spending on health prevention offers both short and long-term benefits and savings; the federal government must continue to support investments in health prevention in order to help reduce health costs for both individuals and the government itself.”

“As a nation, we simply cannot get the growth of health care spending, one of the biggest long-term drivers of our debt and an ever increasing burden on families, under control unless we tackle pervasive chronic conditions like diabetes and heart disease. That’s why it’s so important that we maintain investments in preventive care that will make this country healthier today and in the future,” said Congresswoman Capps.

Chronic conditions are more pervasive than some might expect, affecting not only the physical well-being of Americans, but also productivity and health care costs. Evidence-based preventive care and services are effective in not only reducing death, but also they greatly help reduce the onset of chronic conditions and disabilities, conditions that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes account for more than 75 percent of health care costs. Illness due to chronic conditions can cause missed work days, lower productivity and increased health care costs, especially when they are not properly monitored or diagnosed. When preventive medicine and efforts are employed, incidences of chronic disease are lower, creating net benefits through increased productivity, lower health costs, healthier workers, and saved lives.

Congresswomen Matsui and Capps understand the necessity of deficit reduction, but urge the co-chairs of the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction to consider the health and economic gains of preventive care as they make their decisions. The positives of efforts such as the Affordable Care Act’s Prevention and Public Health Fund would physically and monetarily outweigh those of reducing the deficit by cutting community and clinical prevention efforts.

A PDF copy of the signed letter is available [here](#).

The full text of the letter is below:

Dear Co-Chairs and Members,

As the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction considers proposals to shrink the national deficit by \$1.2 trillion, we respectfully ask that all efforts be made to protect and preserve funding for preventive medicine and prevention efforts, including the Affordable Care Act’s

Prevention and Public Health Fund. Efforts to prevent long-term and chronic diseases – at both the community and clinical level – can have a profoundly positive impact on our nation’s physical and fiscal health through decreased health care costs and increased productivity.

Evidence-based preventive care and services are effective in not only reducing death, but also they greatly help reduce the onset of chronic conditions and disabilities, conditions that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes account for more than 75 percent of health care costs. Preventive medicine includes everything from regular checkups and screenings with a primary care provider to programs that promote healthier lifestyles consisting of better eating habits, exercise, and avoiding risky behaviors such as tobacco use or drug and alcohol abuse.

Unfortunately, preventative care has long been overlooked as a priority. As a result, we are seeing rapid increases in the prevalence of chronic conditions. In fact, 45 percent of Americans have at least one chronic condition, and 26 percent have multiple. For example, less than half of Americans with high blood pressure, and less than a third of Americans with high cholesterol have either adequately controlled. Less than half of adults regularly see a primary care provider to get up-to-date on a core set of clinical preventive services such as cancer screenings, immunizations, and general check-ups. This corresponds to higher incidences of chronic disease.

While we fully understand that the Congressional Budget Office historically has found difficulty with scoring the costs or savings from prevention efforts, a growing body of evidence shows that investments in community prevention are cost-effective and save money. This benefits federal and state governments and taxpayers in the form of reduced Medicare, Medicaid, and other health program spending. But perhaps more importantly, these programs benefit American workers and businesses in the form of lower health care premiums and out-of-pocket expenditures. In fact, a report issued by Trust for America’s Health indicated that investing as little as \$10 per person annually in community-based prevention programs would save the country more than \$16 billion annually within five years - a return on investment of \$5.60 for every \$1 spent. Of the \$16 billion, Medicare would save more than \$5 billion and Medicaid would save more than \$1.9 billion. Private payers would save more than \$9 billion as well. This underscores the value of the Community Transformation Grant programs and other efforts currently funded by the Prevention and Public Health Fund and why they are critical to our long-term goal of lowering health care costs.

The evidence also supports clinical prevention benefits, as well. For example, according to an extensive cost-benefit analysis by the CDC, every dollar spent on immunization saves \$6.30 in

direct medical costs, with an aggregate savings of \$10.5 billion. When including indirect costs to society – a measurement of losses due to missed work, death and disability as well as direct medical costs – the CDC notes that every dollar spent on immunization saves \$18.40, producing societal aggregate savings of \$42 billion. Similarly, CDC notes that as many as 60% of deaths from colorectal cancer could be prevented if everyone age 50 and older were screened regularly. Beyond the health care costs for these individuals, estimates show that each colon cancer death costs over \$288,000 in lost productivity, a cost of \$9 billion annually.

In light of these data, we respectfully ask that you carefully weigh and exam the net positive impact that preventive care can have on our nation's physical and fiscal health as you examine ways to reduce our deficit. Though you will be faced with many difficult decisions with regards to funding critical programs, we are confident that you will make the right decisions that will set our country's fiscal house in order, while maintaining efforts to prevent and fight the onset of chronic diseases.

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